

Effective Airpower

The Israeli Air Force gave a dazzling demonstration of how to employ airpower effectively in its 6-hr. onslaught on June 5 that destroyed most of five Arab air forces on the ground and disposed of the rest in aerial combat. Details of this campaign were reported in this magazine last week (AW&ST June 19, p. 16), and further dispatches on the Mid-East air war will be forthcoming from Tel Aviv in subsequent issues.

There are many pertinent military and political lessons to be drawn from the Israeli air war that destroyed a multi-billion dollar Soviet investment in aircraft, missiles and tanks along with Arab military strength. Among them are:

■ **MiGs do not a mighty nation make.** The Soviet policy of dispensing MiG and Sukhoi fighters and SAM missiles to other nations around the world has given many of them the illusion that mere possession of these modern weapons makes each a mighty force with a voice that must be heeded in international affairs. But the June 5 air blitz proved that weapons alone are impotent without the training, skill and determination to use them effectively. Soviet fighters and SAM missiles, which have not proved very effective in Vietnam, were even less useful in Egypt where the fighters were destroyed primarily on the ground and some missile sites captured intact.

■ **Low-level attack is still a highly effective tactic** difficult to counter. The Israeli assault force made extensive use of 30-mm. cannon fire and rockets to destroy aircraft on the ground. Some of the strikes against the most distant Egyptian air fields precluded any bomb load. Yet, complete destruction of the enemy aircraft was accomplished with accurate cannon fire.

■ **Destruction of the enemy air forces in the opening hours of the war** saved Israeli cities from counter bombardment and also enabled the Israeli Air Force to turn its full weight onto the great tank battles being fought in the Sinai desert. This intervention turned the tide of that key battle and led to the lightning victory that left the Arab nations and their Soviet backers with little but bombastic phrases in the United Nations. Into this ground support the Israelis threw every aircraft they had, including Fouga Magister trainers armed with rockets and cannon, aging Vautour twin-jet bombers, old subsonic Ouragan jet fighters and missile-firing helicopters.

■ **Airpower must be committed in quantity to be effective.** It cannot achieve any decisive goals by piecemeal commitments and long, drawn out attack sequences. With a force of about 300 aircraft, the Israelis flew 3,000 sorties in the first 24-hr. of war to make a decisive strategic contribution to the outcome of the conflict in the air and on the ground. Some strategists may question the wisdom of Israeli decision to withhold no air reserve. But the test of combat proved this policy necessary to achieve vital results in the short time available. The 3,000 sorties on the opening day of the war is a tremendous tribute

to the ground crews, intelligence system and the command and control organization as well as the pilots.

The major political lesson, which still seems to escape many people in Washington, is that the Soviet leaders' policy is as fundamentally anti-American as ever and that they will go to almost any lengths short of a direct nuclear war to implement their implacable hatred of the West. There are a few realists in Washington who have maintained that some of the Sino-Soviet feuding was aimed at lulling the U.S. into a false sense of security. They maintained that, once the situation was ripe, the Soviets would emerge in their familiar colors and lunge for the jugular of Western Europe and the U.S.

This they did in the Mid-East where they poured their second-rate combat equipment into every Arab country around the Mediterranean rim from Algeria to Syria. They fanned every spark of Arab hatred into a conflagration they hoped would sear Western Europe, consume Israel and open a second front for the U.S., already heavily committed in Vietnam.

Until the night of June 5, the Kremlin had strong reason to believe its Mid-East goals would be achieved. It was still pouring tanks, aircraft and munitions into the Arab nations at a heavy rate and resisted every attempt of the United Nations or any other nations to mediate or defuse the growing crisis.

Without the brilliant performance of the Israeli Air Force, they might have indeed achieved these goals.

This relatively small but highly skilled force, equipped primarily with French aircraft and helicopters, has now emerged as the key military factor in the Mid-East power equation.

The smashing defeat it has inflicted on Arab armies and Russian-manufactured equipment has left the Soviets tottering in agonized confusion before the world, like a clumsy bear being stung by a swarm of angry bees. For the first time in many years, the Soviet Mid-East policy has less substance than that of the U.S.

But it would be foolish to imagine that the Soviet leaders will be any more kindly disposed to this nation and Western Europe in defeat than they would have been if their foully plotted victory had been achieved. The Soviets are still the major supplier of complex war equipment to North Vietnam. Their artillery, SAM missiles, MiG fighters, Mil helicopters and now Shyster MRBMs (AW&ST May 15, p. 21) are still pouring into North Vietnam. Nor will they give up this easily in the Mediterranean, despite the present wreckage of their Mid-East program. The councils within the Kremlin will try new tactics, hatch new plots and develop new weapons to try to weaken the Western nations in the Far East as well as the Mid-East, Africa and South America. It is an appropriate time for U.S. policy makers to take stock of our friends and mark well our enemies in this troubled world.

—Robert Hetz